

AN OVERVIEW OF THE JOURNEY OF COMPETITION LAWS IN INDIA: AN APPRAISAL OF WHAT IS AND WHAT IS OUGHT TO BE

Rafique Khan

Assistant Professor (Senior Scale) UPES,
School of Law (Dehradun)

Divya Dwivedi

Assistant Professor UPES,
School of Law (Dehradun)

Dr. Neha Singh

Assistant Professor (Senior Scale) UPES,
School of Law (Dehradun)

Rohit Ranjan

Assistant Professor (Senior Scale) UPES,
School of Law (Dehradun)

The evolution of competition law in India is a fascinating narrative of the country's socio-economic transformation, highlighting the interplay between market regulation, economic ideologies, and the pursuit of equitable growth. From its inception in colonial times to its present-day avatar, India's competition law framework reflects the nation's transition from a closed, controlled economy to a liberalized, globalized marketplace. Each stage of this journey has been shaped by unique historical, political, and economic imperatives, underscoring the need for a regulatory framework that promotes fair competition while balancing consumer welfare and market dynamism.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of India's competition law trajectory, contextualizing its development across distinct eras. It begins with an exploration of the *Pre-Independence Era*, which witnessed the absence of a formal competition law framework but laid the foundation for later regulatory structures due to colonial market practices. Moving to the *Post-Independence Era*, the discussion focuses on the enactment of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act), introduced to curb monopolistic practices and foster a controlled industrial environment in a newly independent India grappling with socio-economic challenges.

The *New Economic Policy of 1991-92*, marked by liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG reforms), catalysed a paradigm shift in India's economic policies. It underscored the inadequacies of the MRTP Act in addressing the complexities of a liberalized market and paved the way for the *Competition Act, of 2002*, a modern statute designed to align with global best practices. Judicial interpretations such as the landmark case of *Braham Dutt vs. Union of India (2005)* further underscored the significance of effective competition law to address new-age economic realities and anti-competitive practices.

Subsequent amendments, including the *Competition Amendment Act of 2007*, enhanced the operational efficiency of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and expanded its jurisdiction. These amendments were critical in strengthening institutional mechanisms for enforcing competition laws and addressing evolving market dynamics. Similarly, legislative and fiscal interventions such as the *Finance Act of 2017* brought procedural efficiencies and redefined administrative frameworks, streamlining the functioning of the CCI.

More recently, the *Competition Amendment Act of 2023* introduced significant provisions to address the challenges posed by digital markets, ensuring fairness, contestability, and transparency in the digital economy. In this context, the *Draft Digital Competition Bill of 2024* emerges as a forward-

looking proposal that seeks to regulate systemically significant digital enterprises and align India's competition law with the imperatives of the digital age.

By tracing these milestones, this chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of India's competition law journey, highlighting how it has evolved in response to changing market structures and economic philosophies. This historical and legal analysis sets the stage for exploring contemporary challenges and future directions in ensuring a competitive, equitable, and innovation-driven market environment.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE-ERA

The Pre-Independence Era laid the foundation for India's journey toward the establishment of competition laws. Although a formal regulatory framework to promote fair competition was absent, the economic and legal practices under colonial rule shaped the need for such laws in the post-independence period. British economic policies were primarily designed to serve imperial interests, fostering monopolistic tendencies that favored colonial enterprises while suppressing indigenous competition. These practices created a highly skewed market structure, limiting the growth of local businesses and necessitating future regulatory interventions.

Monopolistic Trade Practices under Colonial Rule

One of the defining features of the colonial economy was the dominance of monopolistic practices. British enterprises, especially in critical industries such as textiles, jute, and railways, were granted preferential treatment through subsidies, resource access, and market protection. These advantages were often secured through discriminatory tariffs and taxation policies, effectively stifling competition from Indian businesses. This monopolization ensured that key sectors of the economy were controlled by a handful of British firms, restricting opportunities for local enterprises and innovation.

Early Legislative Measures and Market Regulation

While competition laws as understood today were not present, certain legislative measures indirectly influenced market practices and provided limited safeguards:

I. Indian Contract Act, 1872:

This act was one of the earliest legislative instruments to govern commercial agreements in India. Section 27, which prohibited agreements in restraint of trade, was derived from English common law principles and offered basic protection against anti-competitive agreements, though its enforcement was limited.

II. Indian Penal Code, 1860:

Some provisions of the Indian Penal Code aimed to penalize fraudulent and deceptive practices, such as cheating (Section 420). Although not directly linked to competition, these provisions sought to uphold fairness in commercial transactions.

III. Companies Act, 1913:

The Companies Act introduced early principles of corporate governance and oversight, attempting to curb monopolistic tendencies in corporate structures. It marked an initial step toward regulating business practices in the country.

IV. Price Control Orders during World Wars:

During the First and Second World Wars, the colonial government implemented temporary price control measures to prevent exploitation, hoarding, and unfair market practices. These measures represented some of the earliest instances of state intervention in regulating market abuses.

Rise of Indigenous Business Movements

Despite the systemic barriers created by colonial policies, the late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the emergence of indigenous businesses advocating for economic self-reliance. Industrialists like J.N. Tata and G.D. Birla played pivotal roles in challenging British monopolies and laying the groundwork for a competitive Indian market. Their efforts were complemented by nationalist movements led by the Indian National Congress, which emphasized the importance of dismantling colonial economic dominance.

Influence of British Legal and Economic Thought

The legal framework during the colonial period was heavily influenced by British common law, particularly principles opposing restraints of trade, as established in cases like *Mitchel v. Reynolds* (1711). However, the application of these principles in India was selective and primarily designed to benefit British businesses. This selective enforcement highlighted the need for a more equitable and comprehensive competition framework in independent India.

Legacy of the Pre-Independence Era

The monopolistic practices and restrictive trade policies of the colonial period left a legacy of economic inequality and highlighted the need for market regulation. These experiences underscored the importance of a robust legal framework to ensure fair competition and curb exploitation. This realization would later shape the economic policies of independent India, culminating in the enactment of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969, which sought to dismantle the monopolies entrenched during colonial rule.

The Pre-Independence Era played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of competition laws in India. The colonial administration's monopolistic practices and selective regulatory measures underscored the need for a fair and competitive market structure. The economic imbalances of this period served as a key lesson for independent India, highlighting the necessity of establishing a robust competition framework to promote equitable growth and economic justice. This foundational understanding continues to inform India's approach to competition law and market regulation.

POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

1.1. CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS FOR UNDERPINNING OF COMPETITION LAWS

The Competition Act, 2002, derives its legitimacy and authority from the Constitution of India, which lays down the framework for governance and the regulation of economic activities to ensure social and economic justice. While the Constitution does not explicitly mention "competition law," its provisions empower the state to promote free markets, curb anti-competitive practices, and ensure consumer welfare. This framework aligns with the broader constitutional objectives of achieving distributive justice, economic equality, and safeguarding fundamental rights.

Key Constitutional Provisions Supporting Competition Laws

Article 19(1)(g) – Freedom of Trade, Occupation, and Business:

This provision guarantees every citizen the right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business. Competition laws complement this right by ensuring that markets remain open and free from anti-competitive practices such as monopolies, cartels, and abuse of dominance, which could otherwise restrict individuals or businesses from exercising this freedom.

Reasonable Restrictions under Article 19(6):

Article 19(6) allows the state to impose reasonable restrictions on this freedom in the interest of the public. Competition laws, including those against unfair trade practices and monopolistic behavior, fall within the ambit of such reasonable restrictions aimed at promoting public welfare.

1. Article 38 – Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):

Article 38 directs the state to secure a social order in which justice—social, economic, and political—is promoted. By preventing anti-competitive practices and fostering fair competition, competition laws contribute to economic justice and a level playing field for businesses.

2. Article 39(b) and (c) – Distribution of Resources and Prevention of Concentration of Wealth:

These provisions mandate that the state must ensure the equitable distribution of resources and prevent the concentration of wealth and means of production to the detriment of the common good. Competition laws directly address these objectives by curbing monopolistic practices, abuse of dominance, and anti-competitive agreements.

3. Article 14 – Right to Equality:

The principle of equality enshrined in Article 14 underpins competition law by ensuring that no business entity or individual is unfairly favored or discriminated against. This provision supports the enforcement of laws against anti-competitive practices that create an uneven playing field.

4. Article 301 – Freedom of Trade, Commerce, and Intercourse:

Article 301 guarantees the freedom of trade and commerce throughout the territory of India. Competition laws help to uphold this freedom by addressing barriers such as restrictive trade practices and market distortions caused by anti-competitive agreements or abuse of market power.

Judicial Interpretations and Landmark Cases

The judiciary has played a pivotal role in interpreting the constitutional basis for competition laws and affirming their importance in promoting fair markets.

1. Braham Dutt v. Union of India (2005):

In this case, the Supreme Court emphasized the need for a modern competition law framework to replace the outdated Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act). The Court highlighted the importance of balancing economic freedom under Article 19(1)(g) with reasonable restrictions under Article 19(6) to prevent market distortions.

2. Ashoka Smokeless Coal India (P) Ltd. v. Union of India (2007):

The Supreme Court upheld the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) mandate to regulate anti-competitive practices, stating that competition law ensures economic justice as envisaged in the Directive Principles of State Policy, particularly Articles 38 and 39.

3. Automobile Dealers Association v. Union of India (2001):

The Court recognized that competition law serves the broader constitutional goal of preventing monopolies and fostering a fair market environment, aligning with Articles 38 and 39(c).

4. MCX Stock Exchange Ltd. v. SEBI (2012):

The case underscored the importance of preventing abuse of dominance and promoting market access, reinforcing the constitutional guarantee of equality (Article 14) and freedom of trade (Article 19(1)(g)).

5. Competition Commission of India v. Bharti Airtel Ltd. (2019):

The Supreme Court reiterated the role of competition law in ensuring consumer welfare and fair market practices, emphasizing its alignment with constitutional provisions aimed at protecting economic rights.

Constitutional Challenges to Competition Laws

While competition laws have generally been upheld, they have faced challenges on the grounds of excessive delegation of power and violation of fundamental rights. The judiciary has consistently balanced these concerns by interpreting the laws in light of constitutional principles.

- **Reasonableness of Restrictions:**

In several cases, courts have examined whether the restrictions imposed by competition laws under Article 19(6) are reasonable and justified in the public interest.

- **Due Process and Equality:**

Article 14 has been invoked to challenge selective enforcement of competition laws. Courts have emphasized the need for transparent and fair procedures by regulatory authorities like the CCI.

Conclusion

The constitutional framework of India provides a robust foundation for competition laws, aligning them with the goals of economic justice, consumer welfare, and equitable distribution of resources. Through various provisions, such as the freedom of trade under Article 19(1)(g), the directive principles under Articles 38 and 39, and the equality guarantee under Article 14, the Constitution ensures that competition laws serve the dual purpose of promoting free markets and curbing anti-competitive practices. Judicial pronouncements have further strengthened this framework, affirming the constitutional validity and necessity of competition laws in creating a fair and equitable economic order.

1.2. ENACTMENT OF MRTP ACT 1969

The enactment of the **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, of 1969 (MRTP Act)** marked a significant milestone in India's economic regulatory framework. However, its roots can be traced to the post-independence era, when India embarked on building a mixed economy, combining state-led planning with controlled private-sector participation. The MRTP Act was a culmination of earlier legislative efforts, particularly the **Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951 (IDR Act)**, and recommendations of various expert committees aimed at curbing monopolistic practices and ensuring a fair distribution of economic resources.

Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951

The **IDR Act, of 1951**, was one of the earliest legislative interventions in independent India to regulate industries and prevent concentration of economic power. It empowered the government to regulate industrial development, licensing, and expansion, ensuring that industrial resources were utilized for the broader socio-economic goals outlined in the Directive Principles of State Policy.

Key Objectives of the IDR Act

- Control over industrial licensing to regulate market entry.
- Prevention of indiscriminate industrial growth, which could lead to monopolies.
- Allocation of resources to balance regional development.
- Regulation of the production and distribution of key goods to avoid exploitation.

While the IDR Act provided a framework for industrial regulation, it lacked provisions specifically targeting monopolies and restrictive trade practices. The need for a comprehensive law to address these gaps became apparent as the private sector began consolidating market power.

Committees Leading to the MRTP Act

1. Mahalanobis Model (1950s) and the Second Five-Year Plan

The **Second Five-Year Plan (1956–1961)**, based on the **Mahalanobis Model**, emphasized state-led industrialization, and reducing income inequalities. The plan recognized that unchecked private sector

growth could lead to monopolistic practices and a concentration of wealth, undermining the goal of social justice. These ideas influenced subsequent legislative efforts to address monopolies.

2. Hazari Committee Report (1955)

The **Hazari Committee**, tasked with reviewing industrial licensing, highlighted the issue of “*license raj*,” where a few large business houses dominated the industrial sector by manipulating the licensing system. The report underscored the following:

- Large industrial houses were exploiting licensing policies to stifle competition.
- Monopolistic tendencies were growing, leading to resource concentration.
- The need for a law to prevent anti-competitive practices and promote equitable economic development.

The committee's findings laid the groundwork for discussions on a dedicated competition law framework.

3. Mahalanobis Committee on Distribution of Income and Levels of Living (1964)

This committee emphasized the social and economic impacts of monopolies and restrictive trade practices. It recommended stronger government intervention to prevent economic disparities caused by monopolistic behavior. The recommendations aligned with the Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 38 and 39) of the Constitution, which aimed to prevent the concentration of wealth and resources.

4. Monopolies Inquiry Commission (MIC) Report (1965)

The **Monopolies Inquiry Commission**, chaired by **Justice K.C. Dasgupta**, was a landmark in shaping India's competition law framework. The commission's report extensively documented the monopolistic and restrictive trade practices prevailing in the Indian economy.

Key Findings:

- A few large industrial houses controlled significant market share, limiting competition.
- Restrictive trade practices such as price-fixing, market allocation, and predatory pricing were common.
- State regulation alone (via licensing under the IDR Act) was insufficient to address these practices.

Recommendations:

- Enactment of a dedicated law to prevent monopolies and restrictive trade practices.
- Establishment of a regulatory body to monitor and enforce competition law.
- Inclusion of provisions to promote consumer welfare and ensure equitable resource distribution.

The MIC's recommendations directly influenced the drafting and enactment of the MRTP Act.

Enactment of the MRTP Act, 1969

The MRTP Act was introduced to address the gaps in the IDR Act and implement the recommendations of the aforementioned committees. Its objectives were aligned with the Directive Principles of State Policy under Articles 38 and 39 of the Constitution.

Key Objectives:

- Prevent concentration of economic power to the detriment of public interest.
- Prohibit monopolistic, restrictive, and unfair trade practices.
- Regulate mergers, acquisitions, and expansions that could lead to monopolies.
- Protect consumer interests and promote competition.

Core Provisions:

- Establishment of the **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC)** as the enforcement authority.
- Definition and prohibition of monopolistic trade practices, restrictive trade practices, and unfair trade practices.
- Mechanisms to regulate the expansion of large industrial houses and interlocking of ownership.

Challenges of the MRTP Act

Despite its noble objectives, the MRTP Act faced criticism for its limited scope and implementation challenges:

- Focused more on curbing monopolies than promoting competition.
- Excessive reliance on state intervention, leading to bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- Ineffective in addressing the dynamics of a liberalized economy post-1991.

1.3. IMPACT OF NEW ECONOMIC POLICY, 1991-92 (L.P.G. REFORMS)

The New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1991 marked a transformative era in India's economic landscape, bringing in Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG reforms). These reforms redefined the role of the state in economic activities, moving away from a heavily regulated, protectionist economy to a market-driven one. The NEP aimed to dismantle the "license raj," promote market efficiency, attract foreign investment, and integrate India into the global economy. However, this rapid economic transformation exposed the limitations of the existing Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act), which was ill-equipped to handle the challenges of a liberalized market. The need for a robust, modern competition law framework became evident to ensure fair competition, protect consumer interests, and regulate market dynamics effectively.

The reforms initiated by the NEP focused on reducing excessive government control over industrial production, pricing, and trade. The state's withdrawal from several sectors opened the doors for private players and foreign direct investment (FDI). This led to significant economic growth, technological innovation, and industrial diversification. However, it also introduced challenges such as the risk of market abuse by dominant players, cartelization, and anti-competitive practices, which required a reimagined regulatory framework. The MRTP Act, designed for a closed economy, could not address the complexities of a globalized and competitive market.

The MRTP Act's approach to competition regulation was increasingly seen as outdated in this new economic order. Its primary focus was on curbing monopolistic tendencies and restricting the size of enterprises rather than addressing the abuse of dominance or promoting competition. This approach proved inadequate in a liberalized economy, where the emphasis shifted from merely preventing monopolies to ensuring a level playing field for all market participants. Moreover, the MRTP Act lacked provisions to deal with issues like cartelization, unfair trade practices, and mergers or acquisitions that could stifle competition. The enforcement mechanism, led by the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC), suffered from inefficiencies, delays, and a lack of technical expertise, further limiting its effectiveness in the new economic environment.

The LPG reforms also exposed the vulnerabilities of domestic industries to global competition. While the entry of multinational corporations (MNCs) brought in advanced technology, capital, and expertise, it also raised concerns about predatory pricing and dumping practices that could harm local businesses. The surge in mergers and acquisitions during this period highlighted the need for regulatory oversight to prevent market concentration and ensure fair competition. Additionally, consumer welfare became a central concern as markets expanded, and the diversity of goods and services increased. Safeguarding consumers from unfair trade practices and ensuring access to quality products became critical objectives in the post-reform economy.

Recognizing these challenges, policymakers acknowledged the inadequacies of the MRTP Act and initiated steps to replace it with a more comprehensive competition law. This led to the enactment of the Competition Act, of 2002, which was better aligned with the demands of a liberalized and globalized economy. The new act introduced significant changes, including a focus on anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominance, and regulation of mergers and acquisitions. It prioritized consumer welfare and aimed to promote competition in a manner that balanced the interests of businesses and consumers. A key innovation of the Competition Act was the establishment of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), a specialized regulatory body tasked with enforcing competition law efficiently and effectively.

The Competition Act addressed the shortcomings of the MRTP Act by adopting a proactive approach to regulating market behavior rather than merely controlling the size of enterprises. It aligned with global best practices in competition law, enabling India to participate more effectively in the global economy. The act also emphasized the need for transparency, fairness, and consumer protection, which were critical for fostering trust in the new market-driven system.

The New Economic Policy of 1991-92 thus served as a turning point for India's competition law regime. While the LPG reforms unleashed unprecedented economic growth and integration with global markets, they also highlighted the need for a legal framework capable of addressing the complexities of a competitive and open economy. The transition from the MRTP Act to the Competition Act, 2002, reflected India's commitment to creating a fair, competitive, and inclusive economic environment. This evolution not only strengthened the country's regulatory apparatus but also positioned India as a dynamic player in the global economic order.

1.4. HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON COMPETITION POLICY AND LAW (1999)

The **High-Level Committee on Competition Policy and Law**, popularly known as the **Raghavan Committee**, was constituted by the Government of India in **October 1999** under the chairmanship of **S.V.S. Raghavan**. The committee was formed in response to the changing economic landscape following the **Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) reforms** of 1991, which exposed significant inadequacies in the existing competition law framework governed by the **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act)**. Recognizing the need for a modern legal framework aligned with global best practices, the committee was tasked with reviewing the existing competition policy and laws and recommending a robust and forward-looking competition framework.

Terms of Reference

The committee was entrusted with the following terms of reference:

1. **Review the MRTP Act, 1969:** Examine its relevance and adequacy in light of the economic reforms and globalization.
2. **Recommend a New Competition Law Framework:** Suggest changes to the existing legal and policy framework to align with international standards and meet the challenges of a liberalized economy.
3. **Focus on Consumer Welfare:** Ensure the proposed framework protects consumer interests and promotes fair market practices.
4. **Address Emerging Market Challenges:** Develop mechanisms to deal with anti-competitive practices such as abuse of dominance, cartelization, and anti-competitive mergers and acquisitions.
5. **Establish an Enforcement Mechanism:** Recommend the creation of a specialized regulatory body to oversee competition issues and enforce the proposed legal framework effectively.

6. **Facilitate a Level Playing Field:** Create conditions that promote fair competition and prevent the concentration of market power.

Key Observations

The Raghavan Committee conducted a comprehensive analysis of India's economic conditions, the effectiveness of the MRTP Act, and international competition law practices. Some of its key observations included:

1. **Inadequacies of the MRTP Act:** The committee noted that the MRTP Act was outdated, focusing primarily on curbing monopolistic tendencies rather than fostering competition. It lacked provisions to address new-age market practices such as abuse of dominance, cartelization, or anti-competitive mergers.
2. **Globalization and Market Complexity:** The LPG reforms and India's integration into the global economy introduced complexities such as the entry of multinational corporations, cross-border mergers, and unfair trade practices like dumping. The MRTP Act was not equipped to handle these challenges.
3. **Consumer Welfare:** The existing framework inadequately protected consumer interests, especially in preventing price manipulation, ensuring access to quality goods and services, and fostering innovation.
4. **Need for a Proactive Regulator:** The MRTP Commission lacked the expertise, authority, and proactive mechanisms to address evolving competition concerns. There was a need for an independent and specialized regulatory body.
5. **Alignment with Global Standards:** The committee emphasized the importance of aligning India's competition framework with international best practices, especially as India became a signatory to World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements and participated in global trade.

Major Recommendations

The committee's recommendations were instrumental in shaping the **Competition Act, 2002**. Key recommendations included:

1. **Enactment of a Modern Competition Law:** Replace the MRTP Act with a comprehensive law addressing anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominance, and regulation of mergers and acquisitions to prevent market distortions.
2. **Establishment of the Competition Commission of India (CCI):**
 - Create an independent regulatory authority with the power to investigate, adjudicate, and penalize anti-competitive practices.
 - The CCI should consist of experts in law, economics, finance, and trade to ensure informed decision-making.
3. **Shift in Focus:** Move from size-based regulation (targeting monopolies) to conduct-based regulation (addressing market behavior). This would ensure fair competition without penalizing growth or size.
4. **Consumer Protection:** Emphasize consumer welfare as a primary objective of competition law. This included provisions to combat unfair trade practices, ensure access to quality goods and services, and prevent price exploitation.
5. **Merger Regulation:** Introduce a framework for the regulation of mergers and acquisitions, ensuring they did not lead to anti-competitive concentrations of market power.
6. **Adoption of a Leniency Program:** Recommend mechanisms to incentivize whistleblowing on cartels and other anti-competitive practices by offering reduced penalties for cooperation during investigations.

7. **Capacity Building:** Invest in capacity building for the regulatory authority to ensure effective enforcement. This included training for personnel and fostering cooperation with international competition authorities.
8. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Stress the importance of competition advocacy to educate stakeholders, including businesses, consumers, and policymakers, about the benefits of fair competition.
9. **Streamlined Enforcement:** Simplify procedural frameworks to ensure quick and effective resolution of competition issues, minimizing delays in adjudication.

Impact of the Committee's Work

The recommendations of the Raghavan Committee laid the foundation for the **Competition Act, 2002**, which replaced the MRTP Act and introduced a modern competition law framework in India. The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** was established to enforce the act, making India's competition law regime dynamic and in line with global standards. The committee's emphasis on consumer welfare, proactive regulation, and international alignment ensured that India's markets remained competitive, fair, and innovation-driven.

The committee's work also underscored the significance of competition advocacy, making stakeholders aware of the economic and social benefits of a fair marketplace. By addressing the challenges of a globalized economy, the committee's recommendations positioned India to effectively participate in global trade and attract foreign investments while safeguarding domestic interests.

The **High-Level Committee on Competition Policy and Law**, chaired by **S.V.S. Raghavan**, played a pivotal role in transforming India's competition law regime. Its recommendations addressed the limitations of the MRTP Act and provided a roadmap for creating a modern, robust legal framework aligned with global best practices. The enactment of the **Competition Act, 2002**, and the establishment of the **CCI** were direct outcomes of the committee's visionary approach. This transition ensured that India's markets remained competitive, consumer-friendly, and adaptable to the demands of a liberalized global economy.

1.5. ENACTMENT OF THE COMPETITION ACT OF 2002

The Competition Act, of 2002, represents a significant milestone in India's regulatory landscape, replacing the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act) and addressing its limitations. Enacted by the Government of India and enforced by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the act was designed to align India's competition laws with the demands of a liberalized economy and global best practices. The act aims to promote and sustain competition in markets, protect consumer interests, and ensure freedom of trade in the Indian market.

The Competition Act, of 2002, was introduced in the wake of the economic reforms of 1991, which exposed the inadequacies of the MRTP Act in regulating the complexities of a globalized and competitive market. Unlike its predecessor, which focused primarily on controlling monopolies, the Competition Act adopts a more nuanced approach by addressing anti-competitive behavior, abuse of dominance, and anti-competitive combinations (mergers, acquisitions, and amalgamations). It shifts the emphasis from penalizing size to regulating market conduct, ensuring that businesses operate in a manner that fosters healthy competition.

One of the key objectives of the act is to prohibit anti-competitive agreements, which include practices like price-fixing, market-sharing, bid-rigging, and cartelization. Such agreements are deemed to have an appreciable adverse effect on competition (AAEC) and are prohibited under Section 3 of the act. Similarly, Section 4 addresses the abuse of dominant position, ensuring that enterprises do not exploit their market power to engage in practices like predatory pricing, denial of market access, or imposition of unfair conditions on consumers.

The act also regulates mergers and acquisitions to prevent anti-competitive concentrations of market power. Sections 5 and 6 provide a framework for scrutinizing combinations that may have an AAEC. Businesses must notify the CCI of such transactions above specified thresholds, ensuring that mergers or acquisitions do not harm market competition or consumer interests.

The establishment of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) is one of the act's most significant features. The CCI is tasked with investigating and adjudicating competition issues, promoting competition advocacy, and ensuring compliance with the act. It comprises experts from diverse fields such as law, economics, and finance, enabling it to handle complex competition cases effectively. The act also provides for a Director General (DG), who assists the CCI in conducting investigations.

The act emphasizes consumer welfare, recognizing that fair competition benefits consumers by ensuring access to quality goods and services at reasonable prices. It also encourages innovation and efficiency by creating a level playing field for businesses, fostering an environment conducive to economic growth. The act's leniency program incentivizes whistleblowers, particularly in cases of cartels, by offering reduced penalties for cooperation during investigations.

Over time, the act has undergone amendments to address emerging challenges, such as those posed by digital markets and rapidly evolving business models. The Competition (Amendment) Act, of 2023, introduced provisions to regulate the conduct of digital market players and ensure transparency and fairness in the digital economy. The amendments also streamlined the merger review process, reducing timelines for CCI approvals.

In conclusion, the Competition Act, of 2002, serves as a cornerstone of India's modern competition law framework. By addressing anti-competitive practices, promoting consumer welfare, and fostering an open and competitive market environment, the act ensures that India's economy remains dynamic and inclusive. Its adaptability to emerging challenges and alignment with global standards make it a vital tool for maintaining economic fairness and efficiency in an increasingly interconnected world.

1.6. BRAHAM DUTT VS. UNION OF INDIA (2005)

The case of *Brahm Dutt v. Union of India (2005)* arose during a critical juncture in India's competition law landscape. The *Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act)* was being replaced by the *Competition Act, 2002*, as part of the broader reforms necessitated by the liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG) reforms of 1991. While the *Competition Act, 2002*, had been enacted, its implementation was delayed due to procedural and administrative challenges, including the establishment of the *Competition Commission of India (CCI)*.

The petitioner, *Brahm Dutt*, challenged certain provisions of the Competition Act, particularly concerning the powers and composition of the CCI. The case was pivotal in determining the constitutional validity of the act and the manner in which the CCI was structured, which would significantly impact its effectiveness in regulating competition in the Indian economy.

Facts of the Case

- 1. Challenge to the Dual Functions of CCI:** The petition centered on the structure of the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)**, which was entrusted with both **adjudicatory** and **investigative** functions under the Competition Act. The petitioner argued that this dual role violated the principle of separation of powers enshrined in the Indian Constitution.
- 2. Judicial Independence Concern:** The petitioner contended that the CCI's composition, including its members and chairperson, and their manner of appointment compromised judicial independence. It was argued that the same body acting as both an investigator and an adjudicator in competition matters could lead to potential bias and conflict of interest.

3. **Constitutional Validity of the Act:** The petition sought to examine whether the provisions of the Competition Act, of 2002, particularly those relating to the CCI, were in violation of *Articles 14 (equality before the law)* and *19(1)(g) (freedom to trade, business, and profession)* of the Constitution.

Outcome

The **Supreme Court of India**, in its judgment, addressed the structural issues surrounding the Competition Commission of India and provided crucial observations that shaped the future implementation of the Competition Act.

1. **Separation of Powers:** The Court emphasized the importance of maintaining the **separation of powers** in regulatory bodies. It ruled that the CCI's dual role as an investigative and adjudicatory authority created a potential conflict of interest and did not align with constitutional principles of fairness and impartiality.
2. **Division of Roles:** To resolve the conflict, the Court suggested bifurcating the functions of the CCI. The investigative functions were to be handled by a **Director General (DG)** or other independent authorities under the CCI, while the adjudicatory powers were to remain with the Commission.
3. **Judicial Independence:** The Court mandated structural changes in the CCI to ensure judicial independence and reduce any potential executive interference in its functioning. This included adjustments to the process of appointment and composition of the Commission.
4. **Recommendations for Amendments:** The judgment prompted the Government of India to amend the Competition Act to address the concerns raised by the Court. This led to the **Competition (Amendment) Act, of 2007**, which introduced significant changes, including:
 - Clear delineation of investigative and adjudicatory functions.
 - Strengthening the institutional framework and independence of the CCI.
5. **Upholding the Competition Act:** While the Court acknowledged the issues with the CCI's structure, it did not strike down the Competition Act, of 2002. Instead, it provided directions to ensure its implementation in a manner consistent with constitutional principles.

The judgment in *Brahm Dutt v. Union of India* was instrumental in refining India's competition law framework. It ensured that the Competition Commission of India could function effectively as a regulatory authority while adhering to the principles of separation of powers and judicial independence. The structural changes recommended by the Court laid the foundation for the robust and independent functioning of the CCI, making it one of the most significant institutions in India's economic regulation.

1.7. COMPETITION AMENDMENT ACT OF 2007

The **Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007**, marked a pivotal reform in India's competition law framework, addressing critical issues in the **Competition Act, 2002**, and laying the foundation for the effective functioning of the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)**. This amendment was primarily driven by the Supreme Court's observations in the landmark case of *Brahm Dutt v. Union of India (2005)*, which highlighted structural and procedural concerns in the original act, particularly the dual role of the CCI as both an adjudicator and an investigator. The amendment sought to resolve these issues and align India's competition law framework with global best practices.

Backdrop and Need for the Amendment

1. Judicial Concerns in *Brahm Dutt v. Union of India*:

The Supreme Court emphasized the need to maintain the **separation of powers** within the CCI by clearly delineating its investigative and adjudicatory functions. The judgment identified potential conflicts of interest in the original framework of the 2002 act.

2. International Best Practices:

To create a robust competition regime, India needed a modern framework that matched the standards of advanced competition authorities globally, ensuring impartiality and efficiency in addressing competition issues.

3. Operationalizing the CCI:

While the Competition Act, 2002, had been enacted, its enforcement was delayed due to these structural and procedural concerns. The 2007 amendment was necessary to make the CCI fully operational.

Key Features of the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007

1. Separation of Powers:

The amendment introduced a *bifurcation of roles within the CCI*, ensuring that investigative and adjudicatory functions were distinct:

- **Investigative Authority:** The **Director General (DG)**, an independent authority under the CCI, was tasked with conducting investigations into alleged anti-competitive practices.
- **Adjudicatory Authority:** The CCI was designated to adjudicate on matters based on the evidence and reports submitted by the DG.

2. Strengthening the CCI's Institutional Framework:

The amendment enhanced the **independence and capacity** of the CCI:

- It restructured the CCI to function as a quasi-judicial body with experts from fields such as law, economics, finance, and trade.
- It clarified the qualifications, tenure, and appointment process of the chairperson and members to ensure transparency and accountability.

3. Introduction of an Appellate Body:

The amendment established the *Competition Appellate Tribunal (COMPAT)* to hear appeals against the orders and decisions of the CCI. This ensured a separate appellate mechanism, thereby reinforcing the principle of checks and balances.

4. Focus on Mergers and Acquisitions (Combinations):

The amendment streamlined the process for regulating mergers and acquisitions (referred to as combinations):

- It set clear thresholds for mandatory notification of combinations to the CCI.
- The timelines for review and approval of combinations were specified, making the process more predictable and transparent.

5. Procedural Efficiency:

The amendment introduced measures to improve procedural clarity and reduce delays in the investigation and adjudication of competition cases. It aimed to enhance the overall efficiency of the CCI.

6. Consumer Welfare and Advocacy:

The amendment emphasized the role of the CCI in promoting **consumer welfare** and undertaking competition advocacy. This was aimed at increasing awareness among businesses and consumers about the benefits of a competitive marketplace.

Impact and Significance

1. Operationalizing the CCI:

The amendment resolved the structural and procedural issues that had delayed the CCI's functioning. Following the amendment, the CCI was fully operationalized, becoming India's central authority for competition regulation.

2. Enhanced Credibility:

By ensuring the separation of powers and creating an appellate mechanism, the amendment enhanced the credibility and independence of the CCI. This instilled confidence among stakeholders, including businesses, consumers, and international investors.

3. Alignment with Global Standards:

The changes brought Indian competition law closer to international best practices, ensuring that the CCI could effectively address complex competition issues in a liberalized and globalized economy.

4. Streamlined Merger Regulation:

The introduction of clear thresholds and timelines for merger review ensured that India's competition framework could handle the complexities of cross-border mergers and acquisitions, crucial for a growing economy.

5. Consumer and Business Confidence:

The emphasis on procedural fairness and efficiency promoted trust among businesses and consumers, fostering a competitive environment that encouraged innovation and economic growth.

The **Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007**, was a critical reform that transformed India's competition law regime, ensuring that the **Competition Commission of India** functioned as an independent, credible, and efficient regulatory authority. By addressing the shortcomings of the 2002 act and incorporating judicial guidance, the amendment laid a strong foundation for a modern competition law framework. Its focus on separation of powers, procedural clarity, and alignment with global practices made the CCI a pivotal institution in promoting fair competition, safeguarding consumer interests, and fostering economic growth in India.

1.8. FINANCE ACT OF 2017

The Finance Act, 2017, introduced several important changes to the Competition Act, 2002, aimed at restructuring the appellate framework and improving administrative efficiency in handling competition law matters. The primary reform was the merger of the Competition Appellate Tribunal (COMPAT) with the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). This consolidation transferred the responsibility for hearing appeals against orders of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) from COMPAT to NCLAT. As a result, NCLAT assumed a dual role, handling matters related to company law, insolvency, and competition law, ensuring a unified appellate mechanism.

This reform was part of a broader effort to consolidate tribunals across various domains, reducing duplication and streamlining administrative functions. By combining the mandates of multiple tribunals, the government sought to improve adjudicatory efficiency and reduce costs. The transitional provisions under the act ensured a smooth transfer of pending cases from COMPAT to NCLAT without procedural disruptions, maintaining the continuity of ongoing proceedings.

To support its expanded role, NCLAT's procedural and structural framework was adjusted to accommodate competition law matters. This included incorporating experts with specialized knowledge of competition law to handle these cases effectively. The integration also aligned with the

global trend of consolidating tribunal functions to enhance judicial consistency and optimize resources.

The changes had significant relevance, including enhanced efficiency in adjudication, uniformity in decision-making, and reduced administrative costs. It streamlined the appellate mechanism by centralizing jurisdiction, thereby reducing delays and fostering greater judicial coherence. However, concerns regarding the potential overburdening of NCLAT emphasized the need to ensure adequate attention and expertise for competition law cases.

In conclusion, the Finance Act, 2017, marked a crucial reform in India's competition law framework by merging COMPAT with NCLAT. This consolidation promoted efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and uniformity, reinforcing India's commitment to a streamlined and robust regulatory system.

1.9. COMPETITION AMENDMENT ACT OF 2023

The Government of India introduced the Competition Act, 2002 with a vision to promote market competition, safeguard consumer interests, and ensure trade equality. However, with evolving market dynamics, increasing litigation, and the rise of digital markets, the need for updates in the legislation became apparent. Addressing these concerns, the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2023, was enacted after being passed by the Lok Sabha on March 29, 2023, and the Rajya Sabha on April 3, 2023. It received presidential assent on April 11, 2023, bringing into effect a series of reforms aimed at aligning India's competition law with its current economic realities and global antitrust practices. Below is an analysis of the key amendments introduced by the act.

Key Amendments in the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2023

1. Deal Value Threshold

The amendment introduces a deal value threshold for combinations, expanding the scope of transactions that require approval from the Competition Commission of India (CCI). Transactions exceeding INR 2000 crore (approximately US\$ 244 million) in value, involving entities with "substantial business operations in India," now fall within the ambit of CCI scrutiny. This supplements the earlier criteria based solely on asset or turnover thresholds, ensuring that high-value digital or technology-driven deals do not escape regulatory oversight.

2. Time Frame for Approval of Combinations

The act reduces the maximum time for CCI to approve combinations from 210 days to 150 days, ensuring faster resolution of merger and acquisition proceedings. Additionally, the CCI must form a prima facie opinion within 30 days of notification, after which combinations will be deemed approved if no action is taken.

3. Definition of "Control"

The amendment redefines "control" to mean the ability to exercise material influence over the management, affairs, or strategic commercial decisions of an enterprise. This broader definition aligns with global standards and captures instances of significant influence that fall short of outright ownership or majority stakeholding.

4. Redefining "Relevant Market"

The definition of "relevant product market" has been expanded to consider supplier-side substitutability, alongside the existing customer-side substitutability. Additional factors for defining a "relevant geographic market" include the characteristics of goods or services and the cost of switching demand or supply between areas, ensuring a more holistic assessment.

5. Increased Penalty for False Statements

Penalties for providing false statements or omitting material information have been increased from INR 1 crore (US\$ 122,000) to INR 5 crore (US\$ 608,000), underscoring the importance of transparency in regulatory submissions.

6. Global Turnover Penalty

The amendment empowers the CCI to impose penalties based on an enterprise's global turnover, not limited to the relevant product or market in question. This overturns the precedent set by the Excel Corp case, where penalties were calculated based on "relevant turnover." The move is expected to significantly increase penalty amounts in cases involving large multinational corporations.

7. Enhanced Powers of the Director General

The act transfers the authority to appoint the Director General (DG) from the Government of India to the CCI, consolidating its investigative oversight. The DG now has expanded powers, including the ability to summon company agents, conduct dawn raids, request information, and seek relevant documentation during investigations.

8. Settlements and Commitments Framework

A significant addition is the introduction of a settlements and commitments mechanism for disputes relating to anti-competitive vertical agreements and abuse of dominance. Parties can apply for settlements after the Director General's (DG) investigation report, but before the CCI's final order. Commitments can be made anytime after the initiation of an investigation. However, this mechanism does not extend to cartel cases, and no appeals are allowed against settlement or commitment orders.

9. Scope of Anti-Competitive Agreements

The amendment broadens the scope of anti-competitive agreements to include hub-and-spoke arrangements, where entities facilitate or engage in anti-competitive practices indirectly. This expansion ensures that facilitators of horizontal agreements are held accountable.

10. Limitation for Filing Complaints

A limitation period of three years has been introduced for filing competition law complaints, calculated from the date the cause of action arises. However, the CCI retains the discretion to entertain delayed complaints if justified.

11. Deposit for Appeals

To file an appeal with the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) against CCI orders, appellants must now deposit 25% of the penalty amount, ensuring accountability in appeals.

12. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) as Defence

The amendment retains the position that IPRs cannot be used as a defence in cases of abuse of dominance, particularly concerning unfair pricing, predatory pricing, or restricting market access. However, IPR protections remain valid in cases involving anti-competitive agreements under Section 3.

Relevance and Implications

The Competition (Amendment) Act, 2023, addresses longstanding concerns about the efficiency, transparency, and scope of competition law in India. By introducing time-bound approvals for combinations and aligning definitions with global standards, the act fosters a pro-business regulatory environment. The increased penalties, global turnover assessment, and enhanced DG powers strengthen enforcement, deterring anti-competitive practices. The settlements and commitments framework introduces flexibility for resolving disputes, potentially reducing litigation and fostering quicker compliance.

While the reforms have been met with mixed reactions, they are expected to expedite mergers and acquisitions, reduce uncertainties, and bolster India's reputation as an investor-friendly jurisdiction. Furthermore, the broadened scope of anti-competitive agreements and penalties enhances India's ability to tackle challenges posed by digital markets and multinational corporations, aligning its competition law with global antitrust practices. Ultimately, the act represents a critical step forward in ensuring that India's competition law remains robust, dynamic, and conducive to fair and equitable market practices.

1.10. DRAFT DIGITAL COMPETITION BILL OF 2024

The **Draft Digital Competition Bill, 2024**, represents a forward-looking legislative initiative by the Government of India to address the challenges posed by the growing dominance of digital markets. This proposed legislation seeks to complement the existing **Competition Act, 2002**, by introducing provisions specifically tailored to regulate **systemically significant digital enterprises (SSDEs)**, foster fair competition, and ensure consumer protection in the digital economy. It underscores the need for a comprehensive legal framework to tackle issues unique to digital platforms, such as network effects, data dominance, and algorithmic transparency.

Key Features of the Draft Digital Competition Bill

1. Regulation of Systemically Significant Digital Enterprises (SSDEs)

- The bill defines **Systemically Significant Digital Enterprises (SSDEs)** as digital entities that hold a dominant position in the market, owing to their size, market share, or control over critical digital infrastructure.
- Such enterprises are subject to stricter regulations to ensure transparency, contestability, and non-discriminatory practices.

2. Principles of Fairness and Contestability

- The bill emphasizes the principles of fairness, contestability, and transparency to govern the behavior of SSDEs.
- It seeks to promote an equitable playing field for smaller digital players by curbing practices that impede entry or distort competition.

3. Data Access and Interoperability

- Provisions mandate SSDEs to ensure data portability and interoperability, enabling smaller players and new entrants to access necessary data and compete effectively.
- The bill also restricts SSDEs from abusing their control over user data to gain an unfair competitive advantage.

4. Algorithmic Accountability

- SSDEs are required to maintain algorithmic transparency, ensuring that their algorithms do not lead to discriminatory practices or unfair competition.
- The bill introduces mechanisms for auditing and assessing the impact of algorithms on market dynamics and consumer welfare.

5. Anti-Circumvention Measures

- To prevent SSDEs from circumventing regulatory obligations, the bill includes provisions to monitor compliance proactively.
- It empowers regulatory authorities to take swift action against entities engaging in practices that undermine the objectives of the law.

6. Consumer Protection

- The bill strengthens consumer protection measures in the digital economy, focusing on transparency in pricing, advertising, and data usage policies.
- It seeks to empower consumers by ensuring fair access to digital services and safeguarding against exploitative practices.

7. Regulatory Oversight

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) or a dedicated Digital Market Regulator may be empowered to enforce the provisions of the bill.
- The bill includes provisions for periodic reviews and assessments of SSDEs' compliance with regulatory obligations.

8. Penalties and Enforcement

- The bill proposes stringent penalties for non-compliance, including fines based on global turnover for SSDEs violating its provisions.
- It also includes mechanisms for swift adjudication of disputes and appeals to ensure timely enforcement.

Relevance and Implications

The **Draft Digital Competition Bill, 2024**, addresses the growing complexities of the digital economy, where a handful of dominant players control vast markets, influencing competition, consumer choices, and innovation. By introducing targeted regulations for SSDEs, the bill seeks to:

- **Promote Fair Competition:** Ensure that digital markets remain open and contestable for smaller players and new entrants.
- **Enhance Consumer Welfare:** Protect consumers from exploitative practices and provide them with greater control over their data and digital choices.
- **Align with Global Trends:** Reflect regulatory developments in jurisdictions like the EU (Digital Markets Act) and the USA, ensuring that India's framework is globally competitive.
- **Foster Innovation:** Prevent market dominance from stifling innovation by creating a level playing field for all market participants.

The Draft Digital Competition Bill, 2024, is a landmark legislative initiative aimed at regulating the digital economy in India. It seeks to address the challenges posed by the dominance of Systemically Significant Digital Enterprises (SSDEs)—large digital entities that wield significant influence over markets through control of critical infrastructure, data dominance, and network effects. The bill introduces targeted regulations to foster fair competition, promote consumer welfare, and ensure a level playing field in the digital marketplace. Its provisions align India's competition framework with global developments, such as the EU Digital Markets Act, while tailoring solutions to the unique challenges of the Indian digital economy.

The bill's key features include stricter obligations on SSDEs to ensure fairness, contestability, and transparency in their operations. It mandates data portability and interoperability to reduce data monopolization and enable smaller players to compete effectively. Further, the bill introduces algorithmic accountability, requiring SSDEs to ensure their algorithms do not lead to anti-competitive or discriminatory practices. Transparency in pricing, advertising, and data usage policies is also emphasized to protect consumer interests and enhance their control over digital interactions. To ensure compliance, the bill proposes stringent penalties based on global turnover and empowers either the Competition Commission of India (CCI) or a specialized Digital Market Regulator to enforce its provisions.

Despite its ambitious scope, the bill faces several potential setbacks. One significant issue is the ambiguity in definitions, such as "substantial business operations in India" or "material influence," which could lead to varied interpretations and legal disputes. The implementation of provisions like data portability, algorithmic transparency, and interoperability requires significant expertise and resources, posing challenges for regulators. If enforcement responsibilities fall on the CCI, it might face operational strain given its existing workload, particularly in handling complex digital market cases. Additionally, over-regulation risks stifling innovation and deterring investments, especially from global tech firms wary of excessive compliance burdens.

The bill's penalty structure, which includes fines based on global turnover, may invite resistance from multinational corporations and create jurisdictional conflicts, especially in cross-border cases. Furthermore, broad provisions and lack of procedural clarity might lead to prolonged litigation, delaying effective enforcement. The compliance requirements could also inadvertently burden mid-sized digital players, countering the bill's objective of promoting competition. Moreover, overlapping responsibilities between the CCI and other regulatory bodies might lead to inefficiencies and conflicts.

In conclusion, while the Draft Digital Competition Bill, 2024, represents a significant step forward in addressing the unique challenges of digital markets, its success hinges on careful implementation, clarity in provisions, and ensuring a balanced approach that fosters innovation while promoting fair competition. If effectively enacted, the bill has the potential to position India as a leader in digital governance and competition law.

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